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"TWINKLE'S A NICE WORD, SO'S VIRIDIAN."

THE PERILS OF SMOKING IN BED?

THE SANDMAN™

A TREATISE ON OPTICS

DEPARTED SECRETS

A BEAR AND HIS SHADOW

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY

written by

NEIL GAIMAN

illustrated by

JILL THOMPSON

and

VINCE LOCKE

THE LONG DAY IN THE NORTH LANDS.

THE SUN HAS NOT SET FOR OVER A MONTH; EVEN NOW, AT MIDNIGHT, IT HANGS PALE AND SILVER AND COLD ABOVE THE HORIZON.

THE MIDNIGHT SUN.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY, THE LIGHTS OF THE BOREALIS FLICKER AND EXPLODE AND SWIRL IN SURGES OF PLASMA, OF RETINAL PURPLE, FIREWORK YELLOW, *VDU* GREEN.

THIS IS A MIDWINTER DISPLAY, THINKS THE ALDER MAN.

THERE IS SOMETHING DEEPLY UNNATURAL ABOUT SEEING THE NORTHERN LIGHTS IN MIDSUMMER.

THE LAPPS BELIEVE THAT IT IS UNWISE IN ANY WAY TO ATTRACT THE ATTENTION OF THE DANCING NORTHERN LIGHTS, OR THEY WILL CARRY YOU OFF INTO THE SKY, TO BE ONE WITH THEM FOREVER.

THE ALDER MAN IS OLD ENOUGH TO KNOW HOW RARELY THIS HAPPENS. STILL AND ALL, HE IS UNEASY.

HE STAYS AWAKE THROUGH THE NIGHT THAT NEVER COMES, STARING SADLY AT THE LIGHTS IN THE SKY.

IN THE MORNING THE SUN CLIMBS HIGHER INTO THE SKY, AND THE COLOR OF THE SKY TRANSMUTES FROM LEADEN GRAY TO PERFECT CERULEAN BLUE.

DISTURBED DEEP IN HIS BEING, THE ALDER MAN WALKS TWENTY MILES, IN A SLOW CIRCLE, AT A STEADY LOPE, TO CHECK HIS DEATH-TRAPS.

HE MADE THE DEATH-TRAPS HIMSELF.

THEY WERE MADE OF INTERWOVEN THONGS OF REINDEER LEATHER, TIED INTO INTRICATE CAT'S CRADLES, HUNG BY THE ALDER MAN FROM THE BRANCHES OF THE STUNTED TREES.

TO THE NORTH AND EAST AND WEST, THE TRAPS ARE UNTOUCHED.

THE SOUTHERN TRAP, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN TORN APART.

A BIG DEATH IS ON ITS WAY, THEN.

FROM THE SOUTH.

THE ALDER MAN EYES THE SKY. THE SUN HAS PASSED ITS ZENITH, AND THE SHADOWS ARE STREAMING.

PLEASED HE IS THAT THE SHADOWS ARE CLEAR AND CRISP.

CAREFULLY THE ALDER MAN REMOVES HIS CLOTHES, THEN PILES THEM ALL IN A HEAP.

HE PISSES AROUND THEM, IN A WIDE CIRCLE, AND THEY TURN TO STONE.

A MOMENT OF STRETCHING, OF RENDING, BENEATH THE FULL SUN, AND IT IS OVER.

HE IS A BEAR, THEN, WITH THE SHADOW OF A MAN.

HE EYES HIS SHADOW, THEN BARES HIS TEETH, LOWERS HIS MUZZLE, AND BEGINS TO CHEW.

TO BITE OFF YOUR SHADOW IS NEITHER EASY NOR PAINLESS. IT DEMANDS A SINGLE-MINDEDNESS THAT IS ALMOST UNKNOWN IN THIS DAY.

STILL, AT THE END, THE HUGE BEAR SNUFFLES CONTENTEDLY, AND STARES AT THE SHADOW ON THE GROUND.

LISTEN TO ME NOW, O MY SHADOW.

FOR THE PRESENT, YOU ARE LEIB-OLMAI, THE ALDER MAN. I AM BUT A NOTHING BEAR, NAMELESS AND WITHOUT ANY MANNER OF INTEREST.

"MY DEATH IS NOW YOUR DEATH, AND MY DOOM YOUR DOOM. YOURS AND YOURS ALONE, O MY SHADOW."

THEN THE BEAR LUMBERS AROUND THE STONE CAIRN, SQUIRTING RANK BEAR PISS AS IT GOES, AND ITS CLOTHES ARE NO LONGER STONES.

ITS SHADOW (WALKING TENDERLY ON FEET THAT STILL FEEL THE POWER AND TEARING AND EDGE OF SHARP BEAR TEETH) PUTS ON THE CLOTHES.

THE BEAR EYES IT CRITICALLY. IT HAS, TO HIS EYES, LITTLE OF HIS MAJESTY; THERE IS NOT FIRE IN ITS EYES.

STILL, IT WOULD SERVE.

GO.

HE WATCHES HIS SHADOW LIMP AWAY, ALREADY FORGETTING THAT IT WAS HIS SHADOW, KNOWING ONLY THAT IT WAS THE ALDER MAN.

AND, FINALLY, THE BEAR WITHOUT A SHADOW FORGETS THAT IT HAD EVER BEEN THE ALDER MAN, THAT IT HAS EVER BEEN ANYTHING OTHER THAN A BEAR.

ON ALL FOURS THE BEAR LUMBERS NORTH, IN THE PALE LIGHT OF THE EVENING SUN.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?

YOU'RE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING. AREN'T YOU? I MEAN, THE WAY YOU KEEP LOOKING AT THINGS.

UM. EXCEPT DESTINY.

YOU'RE LOOKING FOR... SOME...

WHY DON'T YOU HAVE PROPER EYES? INSTEAD OF THOSE THINGS? EVERYONE ELSE IN THE FAMILY'S GOT PROPER EYES.

Destiny is blind.

YOU KEEP LOOKING AT THE PEOPLE. ARE YOU LOOKING FOR SOMEONE?

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR OUR BROTHER?

We are both looking for our brother.

EXCUSE ME, FOLKS. THIS IS THE ADDRESS. IT'S THAT HOUSE.

YOU WANT ME TO COME IN WITH YOU?

YES.

No. Wait here, please, Ruby.

BUT...

I would rather we conducted this business privately, sister. If you have no objections.

YEAH?

We are looking for Bernard Capax.

YOU WANT DAD? YOU HAVEN'T HEARD? JESUS.

UH. WON'T YOU COME IN?

I'M DANNY CAPAX.

UH. YOU WERE FRIENDS OF MY FATHER'S?

Not as such.

I MET HIM. AGES AGO.

AGES AND AGES AND AGES.

THAT'S MY MOM. SHE'S BEEN KIND OF OUT OF IT, DAD...

LISTEN. HE DIED YESTERDAY.

I'm sorry.

YEAH...

CAN I GET YOU ANYTHING? A BEER?

NO.

MY DAD. I MEAN, I WAS ALWAYS KIND OF DISAPPOINTED IN HIM, YOU KNOW? NOT DISAPPOINTED. SHIT. WHAT'S THE WORD. EMBARRASSED.

AND NOW I DON'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING. IT'S JUST--

LOOK. COME DOWN HERE. I'LL SHOW YOU.

I HAD.TO COME BACK FROM COLLEGE. MAKE THE ARRANGE-MENTS. THIS MORNING.

THE GUY, THE WHATSISNAME, MORTICIAN. KEPT TALKING ABOUT "THE DEPARTED." AS IF DAD HAD JUST HAD TO STEP OUT IN A HURRY...

THEY GAVE US HIS KEYS. I MEAN, SO WE OPENED HIS OFFICE DOWN HERE. WE OPENED HIS FILING CABINETS.

THE FUNERAL'S TOMORROW. **JESUS.** MY DAD. HE WAS SKINNY. HE HAD A DUMB MOUSTACHE, AND A PONY TAIL, SO HE'D LOOK YOUNGER, I SUPPOSE. HE WAS A LAWYER.

I MEAN, MY FATHER WAS THE MOST **BORING** MAN I EVER MET.

I ***LIKED*** HIM OKAY. HE WAS MY DAD. YOU KNOW. BUT I THOUGHT I KNEW HIM.

AND ***LOOK*** AT THIS SHIT. ***LOOK*** AT IT. JESUS. I MEAN, ***MY FATHER***. DAD. GOOD OL' BERNIE CAPAX.

YOU KNOW WHAT ***THESE ARE?*** KRUGERRANDS. ***GOLD*** KRUGERRANDS. TWO HUNDRED OF THEM. LOOK.

ONE BAG OF ***BROWN*** POWDER. MY GUESS IS ***SMACK***. ONE BAG OF ***WHITE*** POWDER. I TASTED IT AND IT MADE MY TONGUE GO ALL NUMB, SO I FIGURE IT'S ***PROB***ABLY COCAINE.

I NEVER ***DID*** DRUGS. DAD USED TO COME DOWN REALLY HEAVY ON US. HE DIDN'T EVEN LIKE MOM ***DRINKING***. YOU ***KNOW***?

GUNS AND KNIVES ARE IN THE ***TOP*** DRAWER.

NEXT DRAWER DOWN IS FILLED WITH BLANK PASSPORTS. HERE--YOU *WANT* ONE? AMERICAN, FRENCH, BRITISH, SOUTH AFRICAN, TAKE YOUR FREAKIN' *PICK*.

JESUS.

I MEAN, HE WAS MY *DAD*. HE WAS A SWEET GUY BUT HE WAS *SO DULL*. YOU KNOW?

BIRTH CERTIFICATES, VARIOUS NAMES AND DATES. CREDIT CARDS, DITTO. I MEAN, THIS IS LIKE A SPY MOVIE OR MISSION IMPOSSIBLE OR SOMETHING.

HOW DO WE EXPLAIN IT TO THE *IRS*?

SHOULD WE TELL THE *POLICE* ANYTHING? OR THE *FBI*?

THERE'S A *PICASSO* IN THE BOTTOM DRAWER. AND A MATISSE. AND SOMETHING I *THINK* MAY BE A DA VINCI FREAKING PENCIL DRAWING. WHATATHEYCALLEMS. CARTOON.

THERE'S OTHER STUFF...

I MEAN, WHO THE HELL *WAS* HE, HUH?

MY FATHER. WHO *WAS* HE?

CAN I *HAVE* THIS?

THAT? YEAH. SURE. WHATEVER.

How did he die?

HA...YEAH. I'VE BEEN DRINKING SINCE BEFORE BREAKFAST, AND I'M NORMALLY A ONE-BEER GUY. AND MOM'S JUST WALKING AROUND LIKE SOMEONE SHOT HER IN THE *BRAIN*. YOU KNOW?

How did your father die?

A *BUILDING* FELL ON HIM. ISN'T THAT... I FORGET THE WORD FOR IT.

IRONIC? DUMB? BIZARRE?

THERE WAS SOME DEMOLITION WORK GOING ON, AND *BAM!* BYE-BYE DADDY...

My dad is a lawyer.

... WHOEVER YOU WERE.

LISTEN. I COULDN'T HELP OVERHEARING YOU EARLIER. YOU SAID DESTINY WAS BLIND. WELL, DIDN'T YOU MEAN ***LOVE?*** IT'S *LOVE IS BLIND.* ***THAT'S*** THE SAYING, ISN'T IT?

The subject is one I find entirely lacking in interest.

YEAH. SO. HOW WAS YOUR LAWYER?

Dead.

HAHAHA. ***CUTE.*** THAT'S LIKE THE JOKE, ISN'T IT? WHAT HAVE YOU GOT IF YOU'VE GOT A DOZEN LAWYERS BURIED UP TO THEIR NECKS IN CATSHIT?

NOT ENOUGH CATSHIT. ***TADAA.*** ENOUGH WITH THE JOKES. HOW WAS HE ***REALLY?***

REALLY DEAD.

OH.

SORRY. AHH. WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO NOW, THEN?

Sister? Whom do We see next?

ETAIN. OF THE SECOND THING. UM. LOOK.

THAT'S THE ONE IN OHIO? GOING TO BE A LONG DRIVE. FOURTEEN, FIFTEEN HOURS AT LEAST.

I FIGURE WE'LL STOP IN A MOTEL TONIGHT, START AGAIN IN THE MORNING WHEN WE'RE FRESH. IT'S ALL ON FARRELL'S PLATINUM CARD, SO MONEY'S NO PROBLEM.

You wish to break our journey? Why?

WELL, SO WE CAN SLEEP, SHIT, SHOWER. WHY DO YOU ***THINK?***

NO.

LOOK, MISTER HIGH AND MIGHTY, I DON'T ***KNOW*** WHO YOU ARE AND I DON'T ***CARE,*** BUT IF YOU THINK I'M DRIVING ALL ***NIGHT*** FOR YOU OR ***ANYONE*** ELSE, YOU'RE OUT OF YOUR ***MIND.***

HERE. ***YOU*** WANT TO CALL FARRELL? YOU WANT ***ME*** TO?

SHIT!

WHAT DO ***YOU*** THINK, LADY, HUH?

I THINK YOU'RE VERY ***NICE.*** I THINK ***TWINKLE'S*** A NICE WORD. SO'S ***VIRIDIAN.*** I MET A LADY ONCE WHO HAD AN IMAGINARY ***FISH.***

GREAT. OKAY. LET ME PUT IT ***THIS*** WAY. WE STOP SOMEWHERE FOR THE NIGHT, ***OR*** I STOP THE CAR HERE, AND I QUIT, AND ***YOU*** CAN DRIVE ALL NIGHT TO OHIO OR ANCHORAGE OR ***TIMBUKTU*** IF YOU WANT TO, WITH***OUT*** ME.

As you will. It makes little difference to me.

ARE YOU SAYING YOU DON'T ***CARE?***

That is what I am saying. Yes.

YOU'RE A SCARY SON OF A BITCH, MISTER. ***CUTE*** AS HELL, BUT SCARY.

LET'S GO TO A MOTEL.

WHAT ABOUT THE ***LAWYER.*** SHOULDN'T WE SEE HIM?

He's dead.

OH ***YES.*** I FORGOT.

OKAY. I'VE GOT US THREE ADJOINING ROOMS. WOULD YOU PEOPLE LIKE TO GO AND EAT FIRST OR JUST ORDER ROOM SERVICE?

I have no wish to eat.

OKAY. **WHATEVER**. JUST RING ROOM-SERVICE IF YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND.

I'VE GOT YOUR KEY-CARDS HERE. YOU KNOW HOW TO OPERATE THEM?

Which is my room?

THEY'RE **ALL THE SAME**. PICK ONE.

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Very well. I will take this one. Good night to you both.

HEY, **WAIT** A MINUTE...

...YOU FORGOT YOUR KEY-CARD.

I DON'T THINK HE **LIKES** KEYS ANY MORE. LEAVE HIM.

HERE. THIS ONE'S YOURS. DO YOU KNOW HOW TO WORK THEM?

KEYS? **SURE**. I FIGURED **THAT** OUT **AGES** AGO. I'M NOT **STUPID** OR ANYTHING.

WELL, I'LL SEE YOU IN THE MORNING, THEN. GOODNIGHT.

FOUR: THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY—A BEAR AND HIS SHADOW—DEPARTED SECRETS—"TWINKLE'S A NICE WORD. SO'S VIRIDIAN." THREE KEYS—A TREATISE ON OPTICS—THE PERILS OF SMOKING IN BED?

SANDMAN
featuring characters
created by
Gaiman, Kieth
and Dringenberg

Written by Neil Gaiman; Pencilled by Jill Thompson; Inked by Vince Locke; Colored by Danny Vozzo; Lettered by Todd Klein; Edited by Karen Berger; with the capable assistance of Lisa Aufenanger.

HER NAME IS RUBY ELISABETH DELONGE.

SHE WAS BORN IN JAMAICA IN 1962.

SHE SPEAKS ELEVEN LANGUAGES. SHE'S BEEN WORKING FOR FARRELL FOR SEVEN YEARS NOW, AND SHE KNOWS WHAT SHE WANTS.

SHE WANTS TO BE RICH. NOT MERELY WEALTHY, BUT RICH LIKE FARRELL, LIKE A TINY HANDFUL OF OTHERS SHE'S MET OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS.

THE PEOPLE WHO ARE RICH ENOUGH THAT THEIR NAMES WILL NEVER WIND UP ON ANY LIST OF THE HUNDRED WEALTHIEST PEOPLE; THEIR NAMES AND FACES QUITE UNKNOWN TO THE PRESS OR THE WORLD...

MONEY.

THAT'S ALL RUBY WANTS.

YOUR FREE VIEWING TIME IS OVER PRESS PAY BUTTON TO CONTINUE WATCHING YOUR MOVIE CHOICE

WAKE-UP CALL FOR 7:00 AM. THAT'S RIGHT.

RUBY DELONGE IS, IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER, A PRACTICING CATHOLIC, AN EXCELLENT COOK, A MEDIOCRE CELLIST, A SPECIALIST IN BOTH ARMED AND UNARMED COMBAT, THREE WEEKS AWAY FROM HER THIRTIETH BIRTHDAY, AND A VIRGIN.

IT MAY BE UNFASHIONABLE TO BE A VIRGIN, BUT RUBY DOESN'T CARE. SHE WANTS A WHITE WEDDING; AND SHE WANTS IT TO MEAN SOMETHING.

THERE WAS A GUY SHE LIKED, A FEW YEARS BACK. LIKED HIM AN AWFUL LOT; BUT HE FAILED A ROUTINE CREDIT CHECK.

PITY, REALLY.

SOMETIMES SHE STILL MISSES HIM.

AND SHE WANTS TO BE *SO* GODDAMNED RICH...

AND SHE WANTS SOMEONE TO LOVE...

AND SHE WANTS TO BE HAPPY...

TOMORROW SHE'LL BE BACK ON THE ROAD, DRIVING FARRELL'S PALE CRAZIES OFF TO THEIR NEXT LUNATIC DESTINATION.

TIRED. SHE'S TIRED.

DESTINY IS BLIND?

ONE CIGARETTE. A GIRL NEEDS HER NICOTINE FIX, AND SHE'S ALREADY CUT DOWN TO FIVE A DAY.

SHE DRAWS THE BLUE SMOKE DEEP INTO HER LUNGS, FEELS HER HEAD GO SWIMMY AND HER INSIDES RELAX.

SHE'S GOT TO GIVE IT UP. SHE REALLY MUST. THESE THINGS ARE GOING TO KILL HER.

IT'S NOT DESTINY. IT'S LOVE.

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SHE WAS RIGHT. HE WAS WRONG.

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IT'S NOT DESTINY. IT'S LOVE.

DELIRIUM EXAMINES THE BACK OF THE ENVELOPE, STARING AT THE LOOPS AND WHORLS OF HER HANDWRITING IN PUZZLEMENT, TRYING TO TEASE SOME MEANING FROM THEM.

THEN SHE SIMPLY LETS HERSELF GO...

CAPAX IS DEAD. THERE IS NO DOUBT OF THAT. THERE IS NOTHING IN HIS SPACE BUT DARKNESS AND COLD AND SILENCE.

ETAIN OF THE SECOND LOOK: THINGS MOVING FAST. STRANGE IMPRESSIONS, DIFFICULT TO LOCATE. NO LONGER WHERE SHE WAS. IS SHE STILL EVEN IN THIS PLANE?

REFUGE. SHE'S TAKEN REFUGE SOMEWHERE.

DELIRIUM EXTENDS HER FLICKERING CONSCIOUSNESS. AN OLD POWER? SOMETHING OBSCURING HER VISION? POSSIBLY.

LET IT RIDE. LET IT RIDE.

LIEB-OLMAI: THE ALDER MAN. SHE KNOWS THE FEEL OF HIM...

AN IMPRESSION OF COLD AND-- SOMETHING INSUBSTANTIAL, HARD TO TOUCH... AND IT'S GONE...

THE DANCING WOMAN AND...

YES.

CONTACT.

CHRIST, TIFFANY. WHAT THE *HELL* HAVE YOU BEEN DOING?

NOTHING. HAVEN'T DONE NOTHING. PROBLY LIKE FLU OR SOMETHING...

GONNA BE SICK AGAIN.

OOKAY. IT'S *OOKAY*. YOU JUST LET IT OUT, HON. YOU LET IT HAPPEN.

JEEZ, ISHTAR, CAN'T YOU MAKE HER THROW UP IN THE *JOHN*? IT *STINKS* IN HERE. HOW'M I SUPPOSED TO PSYCH MYSELF SEXY IN A ROOM STINKS OF *PUKE*?

LEAVE HER ALONE, NANCY.

FIVE MINUTES, GIRLS. LAST NUMBER OF THEIR SET'S JUST STARTING.

WHAT'S THE CROWD LIKE?

SO-SO. IT'S STILL EARLY.

HMPH. I CHECKED IT OUT EARLIER. MOSTLY COLLEGE KIDS. THEY *ALWAYS* GET GRABBY AND THEY'RE *ALWAYS* CHEAP.

OKAY. NEXT SET'S ISHTAR, VENICE, MAI LAI, TIFFANY AND LINDI...

ROGER? TIFFANY'S GOING TO HAVE TO SKIP THIS SET. SHE'S *REALLY* SICK.

ISHTAR... I *GOTTA* GO UP. I'LL BE *FINE*.

YOU'RE THE DANCING LADY, AREN'T YOU? YOU'RE REALLY PRETTY.

HUH? *TIFFANY*?

WELL, I'M NOT FORCING HER ON. BUT HEY, NO DANCING, NO-DOLLARS. YOU GOT THAT, TIFFANY?

CA
VENICE
MAI LAI
TIFFANY
LINDI

GET OUT OF HERE, ROGER...

WE'LL SEE YOU SOO-OOON...

Lucienz

How do things go in my absence?

NO, LORD. NO DIFFICULTIES WHATSOEVER.

Ah. Good. Well, should there be any reason to call me, do not hesitate...

OF COURSE, LORD.

ALL GOES WELL, MY LORD.

Ah. No... difficulties?

AND YOUR QUEST, MY LORD? ARE YOU NEAR TO FINDING YOUR BROTHER?

I have no desire to find my brother. His whereabouts are unimportant to me.

I travel for the sake of travelling, and that is all.

However...

Yes.

Lucien. Perhaps you should make enquiries. It occurs to me that it is possible that certain forces might be acting counter to our interests in this matter.

If this is the case, I would know who. And I will know why.

I'LL PUT SOMETHING ONTO IT IMMEDIATELY, LORD.

I...

IT MAY NOT BE MY PLACE TO SAY THIS, AND, WELL, I ONLY MET YOUR BROTHER ON A HANDFUL OF OCCASIONS. HOWEVER, I LIKED HIM ENORMOUSLY. AND I ALSO RESPECTED HIM.

I HOPE YOU DO FIND HIM...

My brother abandoned his responsibilities.

In retrospect, I suspect he told me that that was what he intended to do. But I did not listen, Lucien, nor did I hear.

Enough. We will speak again soon.

SIR.

'TIS SO, MY BROTHER. WILL YOU WALK A WHILE?

Sir. You wished to talk to me.

If that is what you wish.

You are familiar with the Corinthian?

INDEED. RARE IT IS TO SEE A NIGHTMARE ABROAD IN DAYLIGHT. GOOD DAY TO YE, CORINTHIAN.

AND TO YOU, GREAT LORD.

SO: YOU ACCOMPANY YOUR LORD THIS DAY?

ON HIS SUFFERANCE. I HAD A YEARNING UPON ME TO WALK THE EARTH, THAT MY LORD MORPHEUS WAS GOOD ENOUGH TO GRANT.

'TIS GOOD. MYSELF, I FIND I SPEND AN EVER-INCREASING AMOUNT OF TIME IN THIS MORTAL WORLD. THIS PROMISCUOUS RABBLE: IT SPEAKS TO ME.

Sir?

LET ME GO, YOU ROGUE. I SHALL HAVE YOU IN THE PILLORY FOR THIS, WHERE ROTTEN EGGS ARE PLENTY.

Sir? You have something of mine.

SOMETHING OF YOURS? YOU'RE A LYING CORPSE-WHITE NINNY-HAMMER, A WORM-PICKER AND A SNAIL-CATCHER. HOLD YOUR TONGUE, SIR, OR I'LL WHET MY NEEDLE AND SEW YOUR LIPS TOGETHER!

IF THE EYES ARE THE WINDOWS OF THE SOUL, THEN YOUR SOUL IS BLACK AS THE DEVIL'S ARSE-HOLE--

Enough.

You are Dickon Hawksthorne.

YOU KNOW ME?

Aye. After my fashion.

Tell me, Master Hawksthorne, was it wise to return from transportation? When they find you out, you'll swing for it.

THAT'S A LIE!

It is rare that I tell fortunes. But Tyburn tree haunts your dreams, Master Hawksthorne, and it will continue so to do, until you are hung there in chains, without benefit of clergy.

And your death shall come as a relief to you. For every night, from now until then, you will dance on air with a hempen rope around your neck, and the jeers and catcalls of all those you have ever cared for echoing in your ears...

HERE--*TAKE* YOUR DAMNED STONE, YOU *WIGHT!* I WILL HAVE *NONE* OF IT!

YOU COULD SIMPLY HAVE TAKEN IT BACK FROM HIM. YOU DID NOT *NEED* TO DO THAT.

I do not tell you how to conduct your affairs, brother.

I must confess I see no reason for you to tell me how to conduct mine.

MY AFFAIRS.

YES.

I HAVE GIVEN MUCH *THOUGHT* TO MY AFFAIRS IN RECENT YEARS.

TIMES ARE *CHANGING*, MY BROTHER.

...AND THIS IS WHAT THE INVISIBLE COLLEGE HAS BECOME. HAVE YOU BEEN HERE BEFORE?

I do not believe so.

THEY ARE USING REASON AS A TOOL.

REASON.

IT IS NO MORE **RELIABLE** A TOOL THAN INSTINCT, MYTH OR DREAM.

BUT IT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE FAR MORE DANGEROUS, FOR THEM.

THEY ARE EXPLORING AND CREATING, DEFINING AND DISSECTING...

So I see.

♪ ♪ ♫ ...WHEN I AM **KING**, DILLY DILLY, **YOU** SHALL BE **QUEEN**. LAVENDER'S **BLUE**, DILLY DILLY... ♫ ♫ ♪

OH! MY **HEART**, GENTLEMEN, I DID NOT HEAR YOU COME IN.

No.

BUT I PRESUME YOU ARE HERE TO EXAMINE MY PRIZE, GOOD SIRS. IS HE NOT **FINE**?

THIS IS A SPECIMEN OF **HOMO SYLVESTRIS, ORAN OATAN** AS HE IS CALLED, BY THE NATIVES. THE WILD MAN OF THE WOODS.

HE WAS BROUGHT ALIVE TO THIS COUNTRY FROM THE JUNGLES OF DARK BORNEO, AND I PAID THE CAPTAIN OF THE SHIP TWENTY-FIVE GUINEAS FOR HIM.

I HAVE DISSECTED HIM WITH **MUCH** CARE, FOR DISPLAY TO THE SOCIETY. LET ME **FIRST** DRAW YOUR ATTENTION TO THE ORGANS OF GENERATION--

Enough. I think perhaps you had better recollect urgent business in another room.

BUT FORGIVE ME: IT HAS JUST SWEPT INTO MY MIND THAT I NEED A CERTAIN VOLUME THAT I MUST HAVE MISLAID IN AN ADJACENT ROOM.

GENTLEMEN, I MUST **LEAVE** YOU, FOR THE NONCE. PLEASE--**TOUCH** NOTHING.

This is why you wished to speak to me? To show me that they are cutting up apes? That is nothing new.

Do they think that they can impale the soul of it on their knives? That if they cut deep enough they can extract its dreams, naked and writhing and screaming, from its head?

Reason is a flawed tool at best, my brother.

ONE OF THEM HAS PRISMED THE SUN'S RAYS INTO BEAMS OF DISCRETE COLOR.

A pretty phenomenon, indeed.

MISTER NEWTON--THE YOUNG GENTLEMAN WHO ORDERED THE RAINBOW--HAS MUCH *ELSE* TO SAY ON THE SUBJECT OF *OPTICKS*.

"ARE NOT LIGHT AND GROSS BODIES INTRACONVERTIBLE?"

HE HAS ALREADY POSED THAT QUESTION; ALTHOUGH AT PRESENT IT IS BUT AN IDLE NOTION, AND I *DOUBT* HE WILL RETURN TO IT. HE HAS TOO MANY *OTHER* THINGS TO OCCUPY HIS MIND.

I confess, sir, I fail to understand you...

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MATTER AND LIGHT; THE *TRANSFORMATION*, ONE TO THE OTHER.

I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE. AFTER A WHILE CERTAIN IDEAS BECOME *INEVITABLE*.

This is your territory, brother, not mine.

So they begin to reorganize their lives on principles of reason. Well, what of that? It does not affect my domain; and it will do little to yours that will not change once more.

As you say, you have been here before. In many times, in many worlds.

AEON AFTER AEON. FROM THE DAWN DAYS WHEN TIME WAS FRESH-MINTED. AND FOR HOW MUCH LONGER?

As long as they need us.

ARE NOT LIGHT AND GROSS BODIES INTRACONVERTIBLE? ALAS, THEY ARE. AND FROM THAT FOLLOWS THE FLAMES...

THE BIG BANG. THE LOUD EXPLOSIONS.

SIR! MY ORAN OATAN! WHERE ARE HIS EYES? DID YOU OBSERVE?

WHAT HAPPENED TO HIS EYES?

EYES?

I SEE NO EYES.

AYE. THEN FOLLOWS MY TIME, BROTHER. THE AGE OF FIRE AND FLAME...

HELLO?

ANYONE IN THERE?

OVER HERE, FELLA! QUICKLY!

Your pardon. I was remembering.

MOVE! C'MON YOU NUMB-NUT SON OF A BITCH! THE WHOLE PLACE IS GOING UP!

MOVE!

Ruby.

OUT THROUGH THE FIRE EXIT, BACK THERE. LEADS ONTO THE PARKING LOT. MOVE IT.

Hmm.

Before I leave, do you have any idea how the fire started?

YOU PEOPLE. YOU PEOPLE ARE JUST GONNA KILL ME, YOU KNOW THAT?

YEAH. WE THINK WE KNOW.

LADY IN THE ROOM NEXT TO YOURS, SMOKING IN BED, FALLS ASLEEP, CIGARETTE FALLS ONTO THE BED. WHOOMPF.

IT WAS JUST LUCKY THE NIGHT PORTER SAW THE SMOKE COMING UNDER THE DOOR, AND CALLED US WHEN HE DID.

My sister. Have you seen her?

She would probably have appeared to be a young woman with rather wild hair...

THERE WAS ONLY ONE OTHER PERSON ON THIS WING -- SHE'S ALREADY OUT IN THE PARKING LOT.

LOOK, I HATE TO DISTURB YOU, AND ONLY IF IT'S NOT TOO MUCH TROUBLE, BUT WILL YOU KINDLY GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE, OR AM I GONNA HAVETA BUST YOU IN THE MOUTH AND CARRY YOU OUT MYSELF?

That will not be necessary. I can find my own way out.

And thank you. You have been most helpful.

Ruby is dead, my sister. They tell me that the fire began in her room.

This may of course have been an accident.

However, she was assigned to guard us, and to take us from place to place, and thus we had responsibility for her.

We failed her.

As I say, it might be simple accident that Ruby's room was where the fire started.

As it might be coincidence that our first quarry chose yesterday to be hit by a falling building.

Reason was never an important part of my dominion. But certain conclusions become inescapable.

Do you understand what I am trying to tell you?

RUBY'S DEAD?

Yes.

OH.

OH WOW.

THAT MEANS I GET TO DRIVE.

To Be Continued

FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES
#1 BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

NEIL GAIMAN

"What Gaiman has written is a comics masterpiece."
– PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

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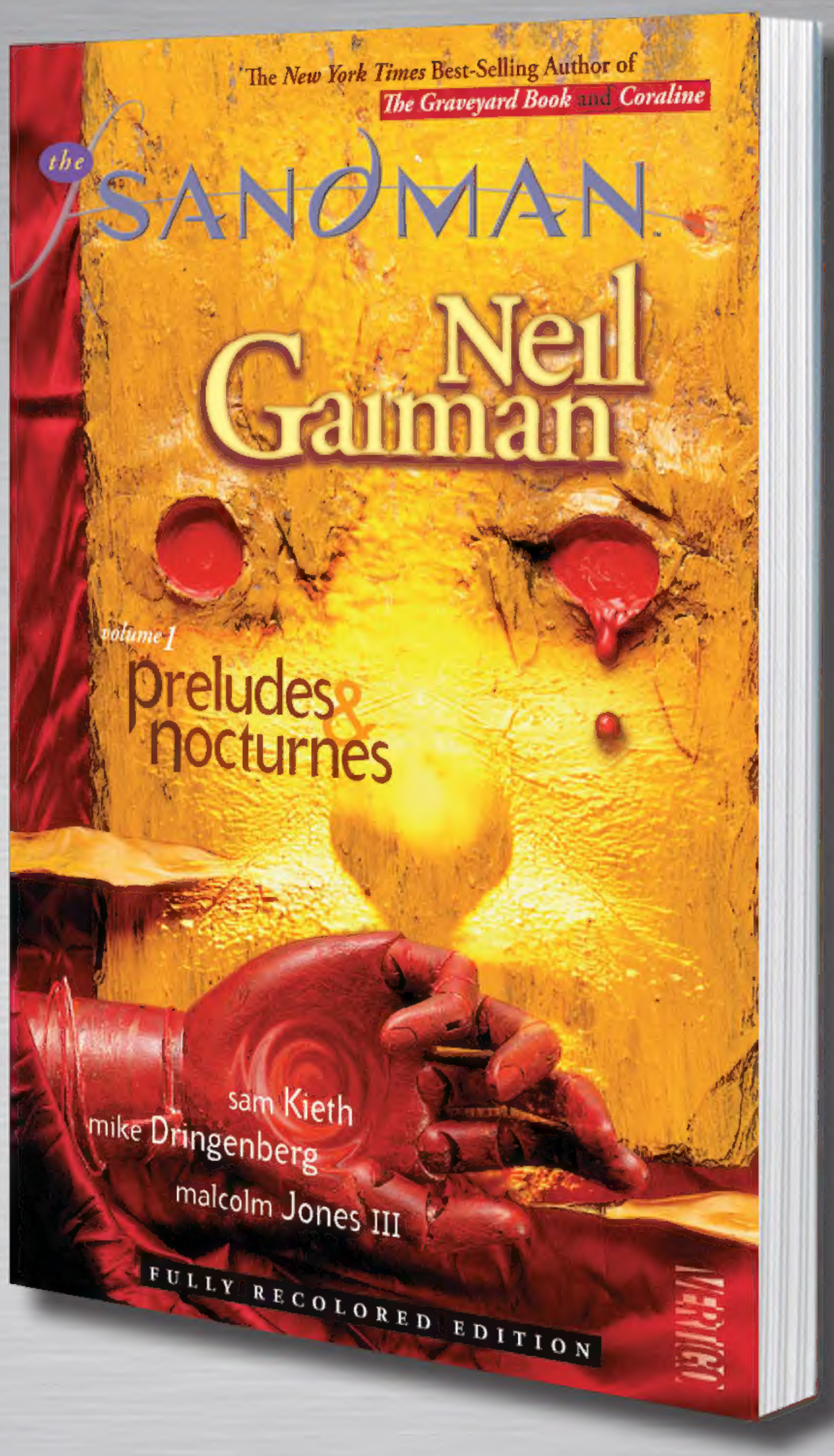

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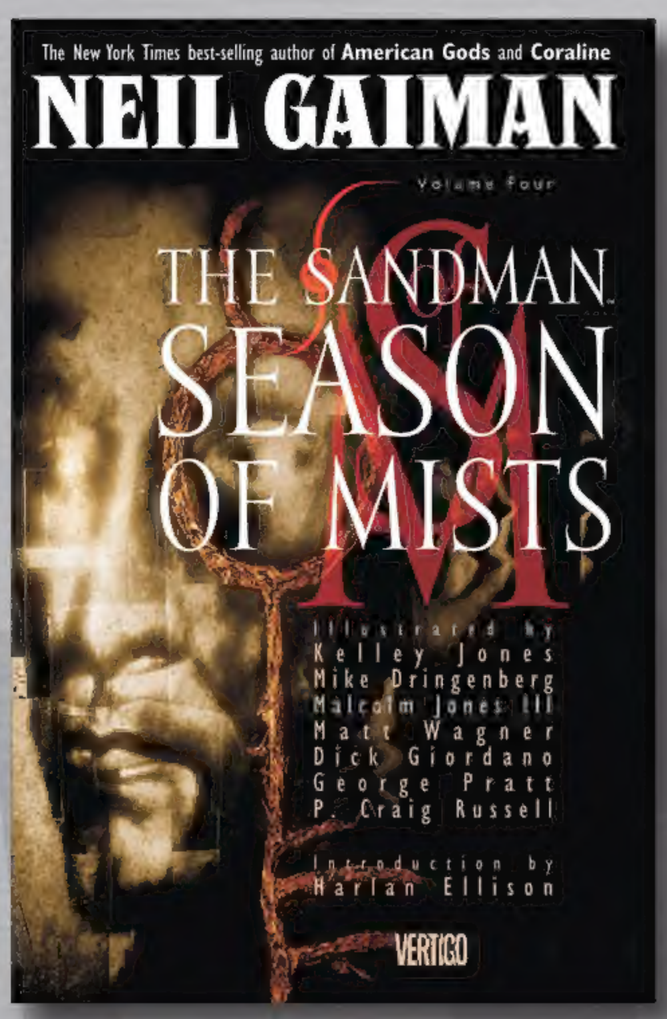

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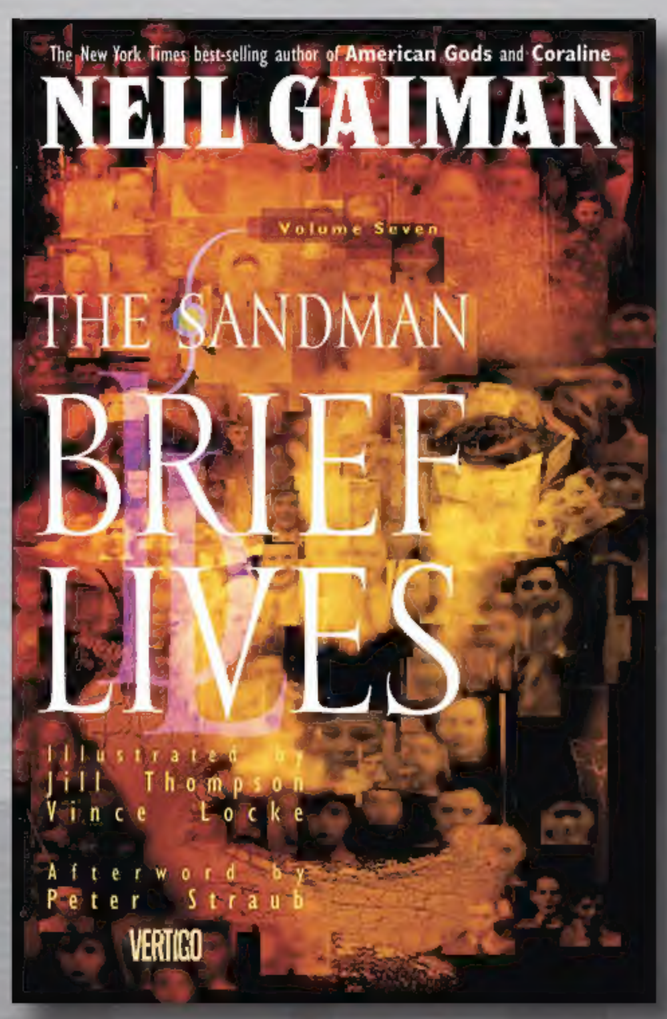

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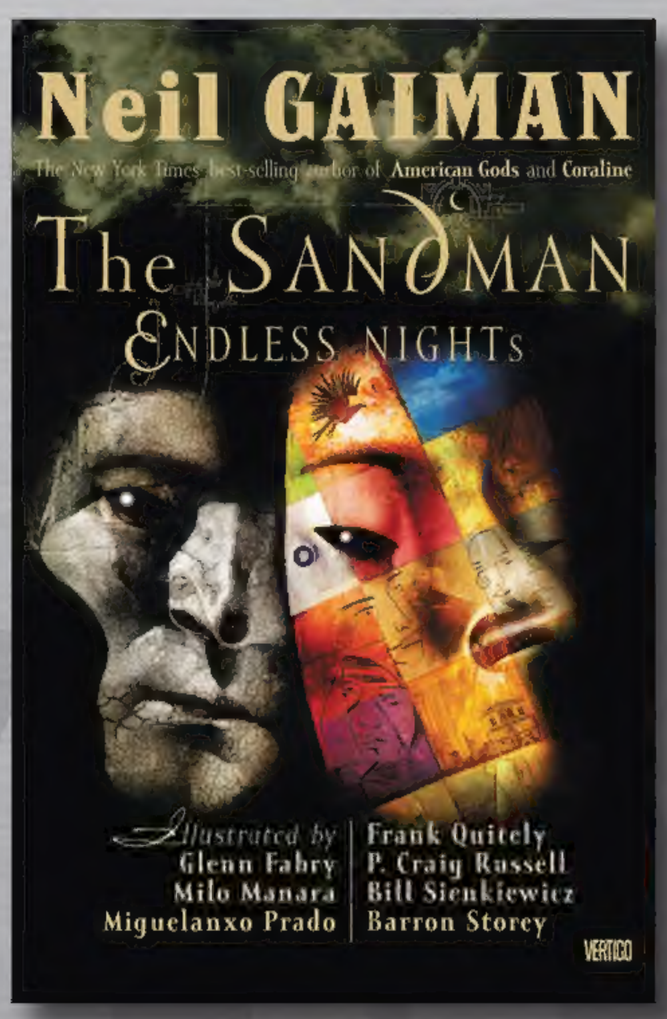

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